



International Gliding Commission 2009 Plenum

President's Report

Our sport continues to face significant pressures and opportunities. As a mature sport we now periodically bid farewell to colleagues each year and acknowledge their contributions to our sport. Sadly we also have friends who leave us too early, as a result of accidents. Their loss is a challenge to us. I will return to this thought later in this report.

IGC Treasurer Dick Bradley will provide the Financial Report for 2008 but I want to assure the delegates that the FAI (and therefore the IGC) is financially in an acceptable position given the turmoil that the economies of the world are facing.

This was the first year in which we ran our premier sanctioned World Gliding Championships (WGC) in the new format. The FAI WGC in Standard, Club and World classes was hosted in Rieti, Italy in July with 104 competitors from 25 countries. The FAI WGC in Open, 18M and 15M classes hosted in Luesse, Germany in August with 130 pilots representing 34 countries.

The preliminary entry numbers for the WGC at Luesse created a particular difficulty for the organisers and I wish to acknowledge their efforts in resolving this problem. The desire of so many pilots to enter the Open, 18M and 15M classes is very encouraging and something that we need to be conscious of as we look to our future championship calendar.

In addition, we were pleased to see 84 gliders representing eight countries attending the 1st South American Continental GC hosted by the Club de Planeadores Otto Ballod, Argentina at the end of January.

These Championships will be reported on separately, but I take this opportunity to congratulate the organisers and the competitors for successful and safe events.

2008 saw the continuation of the latest Sailplane GP-round with qualifying events in Italy, France, the UK, Australia and Slovakia. 77 pilots have flown in this round so far, representing 16 nations. Further qualifying GP races are planned for Chile, Poland and Austria. The location of the 3rd FAI Sailplane GP Final will be announced at the Plenum meeting.

A very successful 3rd season for the IGC-OLC World League for 2008 has recorded entries from 1050 Clubs and gliding organisations – a staggering increase from the 374 clubs that entered the 2007 league. Again this competition will be reported on separately, but I note that the winning effort of the Aeroclub Langenselbold, Germany, was all the more remarkable because they are located in the Frankfurt/main area, under the C-class airspace surrounding Frankfurt.

The preparations for the 2009 FAI World Air Games at Torino, Italy, are well advanced. Brian Spreckley is now assisting the local organising committee develop the overall operational strategies for running the games. The formats of all sports events have been reviewed closely to ensure that the events can be fitted into, what has become, a very tight schedule – especially for the finals. As a result we have modified the GP-race format to provide an elimination round with the top six pilots going into the last day all with zero points, so that all six have an equal chance of being the 2009 FAI World Air Games SGP Champion.

The FAI General Conference was held in Saint Vincent in the valley of Aosta, Italy, in October. A full agenda included an Air Sports Commission President's meeting. Key points arising were extensive discussions about the World Air Games, the gradual movement of the FAI towards replacing subscriptions with fees for services provided to external organisations, and the growing relationship between the FAI and organisations such as Red Bull and Flying Aces. As you are aware, I was elected to the FAI Executive Board and Eric Mozer continues to serve the FAI on the Statues Working Group.

It is one of my aims, as a member of the Executive Board, to further improve the links between the various Air Sports Commissions and between the Commissions and the FAI itself.

A mid-year Bureau meeting was held at the Wasserkuppe, Germany, in October immediately after the FAI General Conference. My thanks to our hosts for this meeting - the DAeC and the Fliegerschule Wasserkuppe.

It is my pleasure to congratulate your Bureau members for the volume of work that was completed at this meeting. These meetings also ensure that we have the opportunity to extensively debate issues that would be difficult to manage purely via the internet or telephone conferencing.

Turning to the future we continue to face the same challenges as previously. The latest statistics provided by the EGU show decreasing membership numbers, decreasing numbers of gliders in service and decreasing launch rates. I presume that these statistics are indicative of what is happening in the rest of the world, especially in light of the economic pressures now facing countries, companies and individuals. Interestingly, we are seeing growth in the numbers participating in the IGC's core sporting activities (World GC, Continental GC, SGP and IGC-OLC).

We participate in a sport that is clearly based in the area of discretionary income for the vast majority of our members. This creates additional pressure adding to that created by airlines, air traffic and competing sports and leisure activities.

At this time of year it is appropriate for us to look back at what we have achieved against what we planned. That is one of the purposes of this annual meeting. The list of actions the Bureau is undertaking is, I am pleased to say, diminished which means that we are getting through the work we have set for ourselves. The update to the Strategic Improvement Actions has been included in the agenda papers for your review. The single most difficult issue we face with these work schedules is having

the time – as volunteers – to do the work; a common complaint for all voluntary organisations.

I am grateful, therefore, to every person who contributes to the management of the IGC and it's ongoing tasks.

Looking at the agenda for this year you will see a continuing reduction in proposals about "rules". We now have a mature set of Annex A rules for governing our championships. This gives us time to focus on other matters.

There are two financial proposals – one to recognise the initiative taken last year to reduce sanction fees for new championship events, and one to update the IGC Financial Policy to accommodate the fact that the President may not represent the IGC at FAI events and to enable more appropriate reimbursement of expenses for those whom we ask to travel to serve IGC purposes. The Sporting Code committee has completed its extensive review of the SC section 3 and has tabled their recommendation that this entire work be accepted. The various Working Groups have made proposals to recommend how we progress the software, continental records, light-end gliders and country development plans.

The FAI staff deserves our sincere thanks and appreciation. Our work would not be possible without their support, ably led by Secretary General Max Bishop.

Finally, I wish to comment on the latest statistics provided by the EGU. These cover the period 1998 to 2007 and most of the members of the EGU have contributed to this database. In this 10-year period there were 310 fatal accidents reported by those member countries that provided statistics to the EGU. Although the data for the number of flights is a bit imprecise over this period, the overall fatal accident rate is about 1.75 per 100,000 launches.

There has been 10 times that number of accidents reported over the same time (3216). These EGU countries reporting accidents represent 76,000 members out of a total IGC membership of 120,000 (2007 figures) or 63% of the total number of glider pilots worldwide. Extrapolating the accident data suggests that - over the period 1998 to 2007 – that there were some 5100 gliding accidents worldwide and potentially 490 fatal accidents.

How many people were put off our sport because of injury or exposure to an accident or the reporting of an accident by the media? We do not know, but one thing is clear, we cannot continue to expose pilots and their families and friends to this level of risk.

As the responsible international sporting body we, the IGC, need to better understand these statistics to gauge how many of these accidents were as a result of people engaging in activities over which we have a degree of control (such as contests, records, and badges). It may be that a significant number of deaths and accidents happened in activities over which we have no control, but which national federations may have some ability to influence.

The message, however, is that we must look to do whatever we can to reduce the level of risk in our sport. We have made inroads at the IGC-level with tighter control of

pilot manoeuvring during starts and finishes at competitions and with support for initiatives such as FLARM and other anti-collision devices. But, continuing on from the ideas introduced over the last two years, it is time for us now to determine how we can make the aircraft more crashworthy, especially for our sanctioned competitions.

We have heard about the work that OSTIV undertake to improve crashworthiness. Now we need to look at how we can create the political environment that will encourage pilots to demand gliders with a greater degree of crashworthiness.

Some 500 fatal accidents over 10 years is a startling number. This year we have invited guest speakers who will give us insight into who the risk groups are amongst the pilots and how we might create a safer environment for our IGC competitions and also generate ideas that we can pass on to national federations to consider.

We cannot make the sport accident free; this is an unrealistic target and must be tempered by the certain knowledge that human errors and financial limitations are part of the risk picture. Even commercial airlines accept that there will be accidents.

I therefore urge you all to think about how we can improve *safety at reasonable cost* and come to the meeting this year prepared to explore how we can better protect those who wish to enjoy the sport of gliding.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Hall", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

President, IGC